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Assessment of the ad hoc advisory groups of the Economic and Social Council on African countries emerging from conflict

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Submitted in pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolution 2004/59, the present report provides an update on the assessment of the work of the Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on Burundi and Guinea-Bissau since the last assessment made in July 2004. It highlights the added value of the Groups, particularly their work in promoting coordinated support to those countries through a comprehensive approach to relief, peace and development. The report also analyses the limits encountered in the work of these bodies and provides an assessment of the implementation of their recommendations. In doing so, it focuses on the lessons that can be learned from this process and used in the context of the newly established Peacebuilding Commission and future United Nations efforts in the field of post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding.

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I. Introduction and background

1. The idea of establishing ad hoc advisory groups on African countries emerging from conflict first appeared in General Assembly resolution 55/217 on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, in which the Assembly requested the Economic and Social Council to consider creating such groups with a view to assessing needs and elaborating a long-term programme of support that would begin with the integration of relief into development. The Security Council also called for greater interaction with the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1170 (1998) and in the presidential statement of 24 September 1998 issued at the end of a ministerial meeting on the situation in Africa. The Security Council reaffirmed the importance of this interaction in January 2002 (S/PRST/2002/2).

2. The Economic and Social Council devoted the high-level segment of its substantive session of 2001 to the role of the United Nations in support of the efforts of African countries to achieve sustainable development. In the ministerial declaration adopted as the outcome document of the high-level debate, the Council emphasized the importance of efforts for integrating peace and development. In response to a request by the Council, the Secretary-General submitted a report on the establishment of an ad hoc advisory group on African countries emerging from conflict (E/2002/12 and Corr.1), with proposals on its mandate and modalities of work.

3. The framework for ad hoc advisory group(s) on African countries emerging from conflict was put in place in Council resolution 2002/1. As set out in the resolution, the mandate of the advisory group(s) is to examine the humanitarian and economic needs of the country in question; review relevant assistance programmes and prepare recommendations for a long-term programme of support based on development priorities, through the integration of relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development into a comprehensive approach to peace and stability; and provide advice on how to ensure that the assistance of the international community in supporting the country in question is adequate, coherent, well-coordinated and effective and promotes synergy.

4. Subsequently, the Council created two ad hoc advisory groups, at the request of the authorities of the countries concerned. By its decision 2002/304, the Council established the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau, while the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi was created by its resolution 2003/16.

5. In 2004, at the request of the Council, the Secretary-General submitted a first assessment of the work of the groups (see E/2004/86). In its resolution 2004/59, the Council, after considering the report, inter alia commended the groups for their innovative and constructive work in support of the countries concerned and proposed ways of enhancing their effectiveness. It also decided to undertake a further assessment of lessons learned from the experience of the groups, including progress made in the implementation of their mandate, during its substantive session of 2006, and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to it in this regard.

6. To avoid repetition from previous documentation and taking into account the fact that many analyses made in 2004 remain valid, the present report will provide an update on the assessment of the work of the groups since then. It will focus on

new developments and on lessons that can be learned from this process in the context of the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission.

7. Post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding have been high on the agenda of the United Nations over the past years and were recognized as important areas of work for the United Nations system in the World Summit Outcome in 2005. The creation of the Peacebuilding Commission is an important achievement in that respect. To help connect the work of the ad hoc advisory groups with the new body and other efforts in that field, the Secretariat has commissioned an independent consultant to analyse the context, background and practice of the ad hoc advisory groups. The report written by the expert, together with key documents of the groups, will soon be available as a publication of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.[1] The present report uses some of the analysis contained in this document.

II. The added value of the ad hoc advisory groups

8. In its resolution 2004/59, the Economic and Social Council made a positive assessment of the work of its ad hoc advisory groups. In particular, it highlighted (a) the open, transparent and participatory approach taken by the groups; (b) the promotion of a comprehensive approach to peace and development; (c) the promotion of an integrated approach to relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development; (d) the close collaboration engaged in with the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions; and (e) the advocacy role for long-term support to the countries concerned through a partnership approach. Over the past two years, the ad hoc advisory groups have built on these strengths.

Promoting coordinated support to post-conflict countries

9. In general terms, the continued mobilization of international support to the countries concerned has been a key contribution of the groups. As Burundi and Guinea-Bissau do not have an extended network of development partners, the groups have helped to sensitize the international community to their needs for assistance. Meetings have been held regularly, although less frequently than in the year following their establishment, and high-level meetings with the Heads of State or Government of Burundi and Guinea-Bissau were organized in parallel to the general debate of the General Assembly in New York.

10. During the period under review, the open, transparent and participatory approach that has been a specificity of the work of the groups compared to traditional intergovernmental mechanisms prevailed and made it possible to reach out to other important entities, such as the Bretton Woods institutions, the European Commission, the African Union and donors. The groups have therefore constituted a useful platform for cooperation with a wide range of development partners in an open spirit, without applying criteria of hard conditionality. For example, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi held two meetings with the Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation of Burundi in November 2005 and January 2006, to which other countries having a direct or potential interest in supporting Burundi, particularly countries of the region and major donors, were invited. Such an extended gathering made the Group a valuable convener of current and potential

[1] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.A2 (forthcoming).

players. As for the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau, joint meetings were held with the group of Friends of Guinea-Bissau on various occasions, underlying the connection between these mechanisms to maximize impact. The Group also continued to interact closely with the country Director for Guinea-Bissau at the International Monetary Fund, creating a synergy between the works of the two actors in support of Guinea-Bissau.

11. In its resolution 2004/59, the Council urged the groups to ensure early contribution to and participation in donor conferences on the countries concerned in order to maximize the impact of their advocacy work. Following this guidance, the Group on Guinea-Bissau was represented at the meeting of Guinea-Bissau's partners, held in Lisbon on 11 February 2005. At that meeting, which aimed at preparing for a future donor round table, representatives of the Group discussed ways of ensuring the re-engagement of the donor community, in the spirit of the partnership set out by the Group in its initial report to the Council. Similarly, the meetings of the Burundi Group with the Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation discussed the recovery plans prepared by the Government, for which support was sought. Following these events, the Minister officially invited the Group to help Burundi prepare the donor conference to be held in Bujumbura in September 2006.

12. One of the most tangible outcomes of the recommendations of the ad hoc advisory groups has been the establishment of the Emergency Economic Management Fund through which direct assistance has been provided to Guinea-Bissau. The Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau has continued to closely follow the use of this instrument and to consider whether it was appropriate to extend it. In December 2005, following a videoconference with the Representative of the Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau and the United Nations Resident Coordinator on the situation in the country, the Chairman of the Group wrote to the States members and observers of the Economic and Social Council, alerting them to the fiscal crisis being faced by the Government and urging them to consider making a contribution to the Fund to help assist the Government in the payment of salaries and the provision of basic social services until the convening of a donor round-table conference. In an effort to relay the work of the United Nations country team, the Chairman of the Group also urged Member States to consider contributing to the implementation of quick-impact projects at the community level which have been developed as part of the United Nations peacebuilding strategy for Guinea-Bissau and have remained underfunded.

Towards a comprehensive approach to relief, peace and development

13. The ad hoc advisory groups were established against the backdrop of the fact that the traditional division between security and political issues on the one hand and economic and social issues on the other, which has prevailed at the United Nations for many years, is both intellectually and empirically unsustainable. As the first intergovernmental bodies that fully recognized and embodied this approach, the groups have played an important role in promoting this idea and provided a test case for future endeavours in this field. This approach is also at the heart of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005) which stressed the interconnectedness of development, security and human rights, and proposed the establishment of a

Peacebuilding Commission to integrate the three dimensions with a view to consolidating peace in post-conflict situations.

14. In pursuance of their mandates, the ad hoc advisory groups have continued to promote a comprehensive approach to peace and development, based on the integration of relief, rehabilitation reconstruction and development. This approach reflects the attention paid by the Council to the transition from relief to development, and was called for in the Council's agreed conclusions 1998/1 and further addressed at several Council meetings.

15. The Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi has always been attentive to the humanitarian situation prevailing in the country, particularly the situation of refugees and displaced persons and the recurrent food crisis, and advocated for going beyond the boundaries of humanitarian assistance to rehabilitate communities in the longer term. In that respect, pursuant to a recommendation made by the Council in its resolution 2004/59, the Group held a meeting with representatives of the United Nations Development Group/Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs working group on transition issues to discuss the mechanisms put in place by the United Nations system in Burundi to improve the coordination of activities in the transition phase.

16. A high level of attention has also been paid by the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau to the political evolution of the country. On 11 October 2004, a few days after an uprising within the army of Guinea-Bissau during which the Chief of Staff of the armed forces was killed, the Group issued a statement in which it expressed deep regret over events in the country and called on the international community to continue to support Guinea-Bissau, especially with emergency budgetary support and restructuring of the armed forces. More recently, the Group met on 22 March 2006 with the Representative of the Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau to discuss the situation in the country following the military actions along the border with Senegal, their humanitarian consequences and their implications for the economic and social situation.

17. By promoting this approach, the groups have fostered interaction and coordination at the Secretariat level and among the various United Nations entities working on the countries concerned.

III. Limits encountered in the work of the ad hoc advisory groups

18. In its resolution 2004/59, the Council identified areas for enhancing the effectiveness of the work of the groups. In particular, it highlighted the need for the groups (a) to foster practical recommendations or strategic advice on how to make the transition from relief to development and to increase relationships with the working group on transition issues; (b) to enter into closer contacts with regional and subregional actors; (c) to strengthen advice on how to ensure that international assistance is adequate, coherent, well-coordinated and effective and promotes synergy, including through exploring modalities to further mobilize additional resources; (d) to ensure their early contribution and participation in donor conferences; and (e) to promote a further increase in the interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council. The groups have taken

these recommendations into account in the pursuit of their work. However, progress has been unequal, showing the limits of the groups as a mechanism for mobilizing support to post-conflict countries.

19. First, the work of the ad hoc advisory groups has been very much contingent on the political situation in the countries concerned. Burundi and Guinea-Bissau have organized presidential and parliamentary elections during the period under review. The groups followed the situation during the campaign and the elections themselves. However, as donors tended to adopt a "wait and see" approach to the outcome of the elections, no major input was expected from the groups. The electoral processes have thus kept the consideration of socio-economic issues by the groups on hold, leading to a certain standstill in their work. The groups started to be active again when the new Governments were in place, which explains the smaller number of meetings held during the period under review compared to previous periods.

20. As intergovernmental bodies, the ad hoc advisory groups are focused on the policy level and the messages they carry to improve the response of the international community to the situations under consideration. They are not technical in nature and have limited expertise and willingness to get involved in the concrete modalities of the delivery of development assistance. As a result, the advice they have provided has remained at the broad policy level, whereas the Council might originally have expected some more specific orientations when it asked for advice on how to ensure that international assistance is adequate, coherent, well-coordinated and effective and promotes synergy. The interaction of the Burundi Group with the working group on transition issues has materialized, as requested by the Council. However, no specific follow-up has come out of the interaction.

21. The interaction of the groups with regional and other organizations has remained limited. While the groups were kept informed of the initiatives taken by organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and the African Development Bank, they had no opportunity to meet these actors at their respective headquarters and to exchange views on the situation in the countries concerned. Only the African Union, through its permanent representation in New York, interacted with the groups repeatedly.

22. Despite the recommendation made by the Council in 2004, the interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council on the situation in Burundi and Guinea-Bissau has not increased during the period under review. While two joint missions were held in June 2003 and 2004 to Guinea-Bissau, the Security Council has not paid any further visit to Guinea-Bissau since then and no such joint mission was ever organized to Burundi. While the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Advisory Groups intervened at the Security Council in the past, such interaction has not been observed in the past year and a half. That being said, the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Security Council on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa has continued to take part assiduously in the work of the groups, thereby maintaining a link between the two organs.

23. It has proved sometimes difficult to sustain the time and attention of members of the ad hoc advisory groups, particularly at the ambassadorial level. This is also explained by the ad hoc nature of the groups, and the difficulty of maintaining, after

several years of existence, a momentum for what was intended to be a temporary mechanism. The newly established Peacebuilding Commission, as a permanent organ to follow post-conflict situations, should facilitate increased and sustained attention and support to the countries concerned.

24. The United Nations Secretariat has a limited capacity to provide services to the ad hoc advisory groups. Two Professional staff members have been assigned to them, each on a part-time basis as they continue to perform other duties related to the servicing of the Council. The staff members have promoted the involvement of entities of the United Nations system and their interaction with the groups, building on the idea that the groups, as bodies of the Economic and Social Council, could tap into entities of the whole system and request their expertise. This support by a large part of the system has been successfully provided. However, the servicing of such an intergovernmental process would gain from a team of staff members fully devoted to this exercise.

25. While the developments described above relate to the working modalities of the groups, some important lessons can also be drawn from the analysis of the implementation of the Groups' recommendations, contained in their reports to the Council.

IV. Assessment of the implementation of the recommendations of the ad hoc advisory groups

26. The ad hoc advisory groups have formulated both short-term and long-term recommendations on the development of Burundi and Guinea-Bissau, pursuant to their mandate contained in Council resolution 2002/1. Short-term recommendations mostly focused on measures to be taken by the Government concerned to improve the political situation and immediate economic performance and on support to be provided by international partners to facilitate the implementation of those measures. Long-term recommendations referred to economic policies and governance reform that should be implemented to sustain development and stability. In its report to the Council in 2005, the Guinea-Bissau Group, responding to a request of the Council, presented an analysis of the implementation of its recommendations (see E/2005/70, sect. V). The present section focuses on broader conclusions that can be drawn at this stage on the impact of the groups' recommendations.

27. A large part of the recommendations made by the ad hoc advisory groups to address short-term crises have been implemented. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, political requirements identified by the Group to obtain donor support were implemented and the Emergency Economic Management Fund recommended by the Group was established by January 2004. The call made by the Group to provide electoral assistance for the credible conduct of elections in 2004 was also followed up by appropriate support. More recently, the Group has called for support to the economic and social quick-impact initiatives taken by the United Nations country team as part of a broader peacebuilding strategy, which has not yet been implemented because of insufficient donor funding. In the case of Burundi, the recommendations made by the Group in its initial report on the need to consolidate the peace process and to promote stability have now been largely implemented. Other recommendations relating to poverty alleviation have also been followed up.

such as the need to facilitate universal access to education, including by waiving fees for indigent children. The call made by the groups for donor support to Burundi at the Forum of Development Partners held in Brussels in January 2004 was also well received and followed by consistent pledges.

28. It appears from the above that in a crisis situation, where urgent needs for national and international action are identified, the groups have played the role that was expected of them by the Council and more broadly by the international community. They have asserted themselves as actors in international assistance to their target country, creating a momentum for support while maintaining a balanced view of what needed to be done. The composition of the groups, namely the country itself and a combination of African and donor countries, has allowed a cross-fertilization of knowledge and contributed to the credibility of the process.

29. In view of the instability that has prevailed in Burundi and Guinea-Bissau for a long time, most attention has been paid to solving immediate problems rather than elaborating a long-term vision. The recommendations made by the ad hoc advisory groups for long-term development have not benefited from the same level of attention and, overall, there has not been significant progress on their implementation. For example, for both countries, the groups identified the formulation of a comprehensive economic diversification strategy as a prerequisite for finding new sources of growth and employment opportunities. That recommendation, as well as others related to priority areas for sustainable development, remains to be seriously considered by the national authorities and their development partners. The consideration of the poverty reduction strategy paper, in the case of Burundi, and the preparation of a donor round table for Guinea-Bissau will probably provide such an opportunity.

30. The continued mobilization of donor support has been an important aspect of the work of the ad hoc advisory groups, which have experienced some success in that respect. However, substantial discrepancies between donor pledges and actual disbursements have been noticed for both countries. The Emergency Economic Management Fund set up for Guinea-Bissau, which has proved very helpful in covering key administrative functions of the Government, received only a quarter of what was required to cover the fiscal gap for the year 2004. Since then, donor support has been insufficient in view of the unsustainable debt burden of the country and its persistent fiscal deficit. As for Burundi, at the Forum of Development Partners in January 2004, participants pledged US$ 1.03 billion of assistance, an amount that has not by far been translated into equivalent tangible support. Similarly, although the United Nations consolidated inter-agency appeal for Burundi has increasingly been funded since the Group was established, only 56 per cent of the required support was effectively received in 2005. Renewed commitments were made in Bujumbura in February 2006 and will probably be repeated and increased at the donor conference scheduled for September.

31. The experience of the groups underlines the need to find appropriate mechanisms to promote "good donorship" and ensure that the population obtains some dividends of peace and concrete benefits that enable it to believe in peacebuilding efforts. The future Peacebuilding Commission may wish to explore measures to improve the situation on that front.

V. Conclusion

32. The theme of post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding has gained importance within the international community, in particular, at the United Nations. Nearly half of all countries emerging from conflict relapse into violence within five years, and research indicates that they need strong international assistance for at least 10 years. This situation has brought the importance of appropriate international mechanisms to light.

33. The ad hoc advisory groups are the first institutionalized mechanism to address this issue in a comprehensive way. Thanks to their informal and advisory nature, they have demonstrated a pragmatic, flexible and non-bureaucratic approach to the problems encountered and have promoted cooperation in a spirit of partnership. Although their experience has been limited to two countries, they have constituted an "avant-garde" that can inspire future similar work. The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, as a permanent organ devoted to these complex issues, aims at strengthening this approach in support of the countries concerned.

34. Once it is operational, the Commission should carefully consider the work of the ad hoc advisory groups and use the lessons that can be drawn from this experience, including (a) the need to have appropriate mechanisms to mobilize donors and promote the translation of pledges into disbursements (ensuring "good donorship"); (b) the importance of going beyond immediate problem-solving in the countries considered and defining a vision, from the very beginning, of longer-term rehabilitation and support; (c) the need to stay engaged in favour of the countries concerned by means of concrete development support, even when the political situation (for example an electoral process) would traditionally lead to a "wait and see" approach; (d) making good use of the work of United Nations entities to complement the policy approach of the intergovernmental body by strong support at the technical and operational level; and (e) ensuring good articulation with regional partners of the countries concerned, including regional and subregional organizations, regional development banks and the regional commissions.